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ABSTRACT

Views of 48 foreign students concerning orientation needs at the University of Connecticut were surveyed. The following orientation activities were identified as most important, and are listed in the approximate order of importance: (1) U.S. government regulations (about visas, immigration, social security, and taxes); (2) needs of the spouse (including English language training, educational opportunities, work opportunities, health care, and social activities); (3) the International Student Office and the foreign student advisor; (4) health care; (5) services available to students at the university (including counseling, writing clinics, and career placement); (6) on- and off-campus student employment; (7) information on student housing accommodations (mailboxes, laundry, cooking); (8) bus service; (9) housing; (10) the registration procedure; (11) the international center services, programs, and staff; (12) a tour of the campus; (13) the American system of higher education; and (14) the role of the American advisor. It is recommended that orientation activities for foreign students be publicized more widely. Suggestions provided by students are included, along with students' ranking of orientation activities, and a sample questionnaire. (SW)

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FOREIGN STUDENT ORIENTATION NEEDS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT: RESULTS OF A SURVEY

By

Dr. Richard H. Pfau

Abstract

This report summarizes the results of a survey undertaken to help determine areas which should be included in the University of Connecticut's orientation program for new foreign students. Questionnaires completed by 48 foreign students revealed that clear preferences for orientation activities exist. The 86 topics and activities surveyed are ranked in order of apparent importance, suggestions provided by students are summarized, and a need for adequate publicity is pointed out.

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March 1982

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MAJOR FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Student Preferences for Orientation Activities

An analysis of questionnaires returned by 48 foreign students studying at the University of Connecticut indicated that clear preferences exist about possible orientation activities which might be conducted by the University. These students clearly felt that some orientation activities are more important than others.

The most important in their opinion, listed in approximate order of importance, are:

-- U.S. Government Regulations (about visas, immigration, social security, and taxes).

-- Needs of the Spouse (including English language training, educational opportunities, work opportunities, health care, and social activities for the spouse).

-- The International Student Office and the Foreign Student Advisor.

-- Health Care (including medical insurance and health services at UCONN).

-- Services Available to Students at the University (e.x., Counselling Services, Writing Clinic, Career Placement, . . .).

-- Student Employment (on campus and off campus).

-- An Introduction to the Student's Housing Accommodations (mailboxes, laundry, cooking and refrigerators, telephone system, . . .).

-- Bus Service (to Willimantic, Boston, Hartford, N.Y.).

-- Housing (how to find, costs, . . .).

-- The Registration Procedure.

-- The International Center (services, programs, staff).

-- A Tour of the Campus at Storrs.

-- The American System of Higher Education.

-- The Academic Advisor (introduction to, role of, ...).

Areas generally considered by students to be the least important were the following:

-- The Anonymous Pub.

-- Trips to the Woodstock County Fair, to Sturbridge Village, to Mansfield and Willimantic, and to the Mystic Aquarium and Seaport.

-- The U.S. Political Process (an introduction to).

-- The Contemporary American Family.

-- Minority Cultures in the U.S.A.

-- Certain areas related to coursework, such as preparing academic and social schedules, taking class notes well, and taking essay and objective tests.

Details about these and other areas surveyed are contained in Appendix A.

Recommendation: The information contained in Appendix A should be used to guide decisions about what to include in future orientation programs for foreign students.

The Need for Publicity

During interviews with some foreign students it was found that most had not attended orientation activities, and that many did not seem to know about these activities when they arrived at the University. Many also seemed unaware of the existence of the International Center until they "discovered" it some weeks or months after their arrival.

Although welcoming letters are sent to new foreign

students before they arrive, these apparently are not sufficient to make some of the students aware of orientation activities and of other services available to them. In addition, several groups of persons from other cultures who might benefit from the orientation program, but who are not considered to be "foreign students", seem to be mostly missed when orientation activities are planned and publicized. This "hidden minority" seems to include students from Puerto Rico, new immigrants to the U.S.A., and resident aliens.

Recommendation: Orientation activities for foreign students should be publicized more widely, so that all who might benefit from these activities learn about them and are encouraged to attend.

Possible ways of doing this seem to include: (a) sending details of the orientation program to all faculty on campus, with a request that they inform new students from other cultures about the program and ask them to attend, (b) including an article in the University's newspapers at the beginning of the semester, describing the orientation program and the International Center, and welcoming interested persons to come, and (c) as before, continuing to send details of the orientation program to foreign students before they arrive on campus, but also expanding mailings to include new students who are immigrants to the U.S.A., resident aliens, or are from Puerto Rico.

Comments and Suggestions Provided by Students

On the questionnaire and during interviews, students provided a number of potentially useful comments and suggestions about orientation activities. In addition to expressing appreciation for the International Center's interest in improving the orientation program, and gratitude for services provided by the Center and its staff in the past, concrete

suggestions included the following:

1. That a comprehensive pamphlet be developed and provided to all concerned students, containing useful information not included in the orientation program as well as information which is included, but which might be forgotten. (Although a pamphlet of this type has been developed at UCONN, it can be made more comprehensive -- perhaps along the lines of the International Student Handbook prepared by the University of Maine at Orono, this being an outstanding example of what might be done).

2. Provide a name and phone number to call when students first arrive, for preliminary information they may need. The first days are the most traumatic, and students should have a contact person before orientation activities begin.

3. Introduce students to persons who can help them if they are in difficulty. This could be a contact person at the International Center or a more personal long term contact such as a "big brother" or "big sister". Foreign students often don't know who to ask for information and help when routine or unexpected happenings occur (such as a theft or an accident).

4. Informal discussions are preferred during orientation sessions, rather than lectures.

5. Several persons expressed a desire for scheduled trips to places farther away than those mentioned on the questionnaire (such as to Disney Land, Niagara Falls, Cape Cod, Washington, D.C., Montreal, and California).

6. Provide a list of new international students to interested groups, such as the Middle Eastern Students Association, and have these groups help with orientation activities.

7. Publish a booklet containing the names of international students at UCONN, their countries, addresses, and fields of study.

8. Provide a warm welcome by picking up new students at spots where most will arrive (such as the bus stop in Willimantic), and take them to their rooms at the University. Students can also be given handouts and other information during this first contact.

9. Involve foreign students now at UCONN more in planning and conducting orientation activities.

10. Several students also pointed out that orientation activities can help students only up to a certain point. After that, they need to take over for themselves--and they are mature enough to do so. Orientation activities should only deal with "the basics".

In addition to these suggestions, additions to a number of topics and activities mentioned on the questionnaire were also provided, as follows:

-- Needs of the Spouse (include information about children, such as how to enroll children in school, the baby sitting system, and how to find day care).

-- Automobiles (include information on how to buy a car, dealing with sometimes less than honest car dealers and mechanics at garages, how to learn to drive, applying for a learners' license, parking regulations on campus, how to car pool, and how to rent a car).

-- Cultural Do's and Don'ts in the U.S.A. (talk about dating and invite Middle Eastern men).

-- Shopping Facilities on Campus (include information about how to buy books, lunch wagons on campus, and sales at the Co-op).

-- How to Buy at Lower Prices (include how to buy at tag sales).

-- Recreational and Social Opportunities (include information about events at the School of Fine Arts).

-- American Culture (include information on conservatism).

-- Minority Cultures in the U.S.A. (include information on Title VII).

-- The Contemporary American Family (include homosexuality, and gay rights ordinances).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Purpose and Initiation

At the request of the Director of the University of Connecticut's International Center (Mrs. Dania Stevens), this study was undertaken to provide information useful in helping to prepare an improved orientation program for foreign students coming to the University.

Questionnaire Development and Data Gathering Techniques

During November 1981, areas were identified which might be included in an orientation program, by reviewing programs previously conducted by the University and by reading a number of relevant publications (especially Lee, 1981; "Orientation of Foreign Students," 1980; and Spaulding and Flack, 1976). A questionnaire was then developed to obtain student reactions to the areas identified.

The questionnaire used (shown in Appendix B) was developed with the help of the Director of the International Center. A six choice agreement-disagreement type scale was used to obtain student reactions to each possible activity. This scale was based upon a similar response format used in another study of foreign students studying at U.S. colleges and universities (Lee, 1981).

This questionnaire was pilot tested on several students, revised, and then sent by the International Center on 30 November 1981 to about 500 students listed on the somewhat dated University records then available. (It was later discovered that about one third of these students had

either graduated, were not in Connecticut, or were at unknown addresses).

This initial mailing was followed by a second mailing by the International Center to students staying at the University's Graduate Student Residences, by sending personal notes to all of those students, and by face-to-face contacts aimed at increasing the response rate.

By 5 March 1982, a total of 48 questionnaires were returned by students surveyed. This seems to represent about a 20% response rate by those who received questionnaires.

During December 1981, ten students were also interviewed to lend perspective to the quantitative information provided by the questionnaire, and to obtain other types of information.

Data Analysis

The information provided by students on the questionnaire was analyzed in several ways. Responses to each question were tabulated, and the arithmetic mean of each was calculated (based upon the ordinal scale of 1 to 6 used for responses). Areas surveyed were then ranked from the most important to the least important, based upon these mean values.

Appendix A shows the means and rankings which resulted. The standard error of the means shown in that Appendix ranged from .1 to .2 units.

To help readers better interpret the importance of each item ranked, the percentage of students who considered an item to be "Very important" or "Quite important" was also calculated and is shown next to each item in Appendix A. These percentage figures were also used to rank items that had similar mean values. (If student opinions of importance are related to their actual behaviors, the percentage figures shown should provide a rough indication of the percentage of new foreign students who might attend each activity listed).

Responses to open-ended questions asked during the

interviews, and to the "Comments and Suggestions" section of the questionnaire, were analyzed more subjectively. Responses having similar patterns as well as suggestions mentioned by only one student but considered to be of some potential importance were summarized, and are shown in the first section of this report.

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APPENDIX A

PRIORITIES OF ORIENTATION ACTIVITIES SURVEYED BASED UPON FOREIGN STUDENT RESPONSES

Mean Response	Students Responding "Very" or "Quite" Important	Topic or Activity
5.7	90%	Visa and Immigration (types of visas, regulations, how to change visas, ...).
5.6	94%[a]	English Language Training (for the spouse).
5.6	94%[a]	Educational Opportunities (for the spouse)
5.5	90%	Social Security (how to get social security numbers; when they are needed).
5.4	88%[a]	Work Opportunities (for the spouse).
5.3	85%	International Student Office and the Foreign Student Advisor (role of, location, services provided, staff).
5.3	81%[a]	Health Care (for the spouse).
5.3	79%	Tax Regulations (income tax).
5.3	75%[a]	Social Activities for the Spouse.
5.2	81%	Medical Insurance (types of, how to get).
5.1	81%	Health Services at UCONN (introduction to infirmary).
5.1	79%	Services Available to Students at the University (ex., counselling services, writing clinic, career placement, ...).
5.1	75%	Student Employment On Campus (student work).
5.1	69%	Introduction to the Student's Housing Accommodations (mailboxes, laundry, cooking and refrigerators, telephone system, ...).
5.0	75%	Bus Service (to Willimantic, Boston, Hartford, New York).

Mean Response	Students Responding "Very" or "Quite" Important	Topic or Activity
5.0	69%	Housing (how to find, costs, ...).
5.0	63%	The Registration Procedure.
4.9	77%	International Center (services, programs, staff).
4.9	73%	The Campus at Storrs (a tour of).
4.9	71%	Student Employment Off Campus (regulations, how to find).
4.9	63%	The American System of Higher Education (structure, organization, goals, types of higher education institutions, ...).
4.8	73%	Academic Advisor (introduction to, the role of, ...).
4.8	69%	Use of Specialized Journal Indexes in the Library (in academic area of specialization).
4.8	67%	Off Campus Health Services (dental, drug stores, hospitals).
4.8	65%	Use of the Main Library Catalogue to Locate Books.
4.8	65%	Welcoming Picnic (at the International Center).
4.8	63%	Welcoming Dinner.
4.8	63%	General Tour of the Main Library.
4.8	63%	Banking in Storrs (how to open checking and savings accounts).
4.8	60%	Coffee Hours at the International Center.
4.8	60%	Automobiles (how to get a drivers license, auto registration, insurance, how to purchase a car).
4.7	67%	Department Requirements for the Degree (a review of, ...).

Mean Response	Students Responding "Very" or "Quite" Important	Topic or Activity
4.7	67%	Assistantships (an introduction to duties, hours, expectations, fringe benefits).
4.7	63%	Athletic Facilities Available to Students (swimming pools and schedule of use, ice skating, horseback riding, tennis, ...).
4.7	60%	Transportation On Campus.
4.7	58%	Cultural Do's and Don'ts in the U.S.A.
4.7	56%	Activities at the Graduate Student Residences (to help meet and socialize with students there).
4.7	48%	Trip to New York.
4.6	67%	Accepted Styles of Writing in Your Field of Specialization.
4.6	67%	Guidelines for Gathering Information and Writing Term Papers and Reports.
4.6	58%	Post Office (location, services, and prices).
4.6	56%	Specialized Library Collections on Campus (related to academic area of specialization).
4.5	54%	Tips for Healthy Living in the U.S.A.
4.5	52%	Government Publications in the Library (an introduction to what is available, locations of U.S. and U.N. documents, ...).
4.5	46%	Trip to Boston.
4.4	52%	Department Faculty, Students, and Staff (introduction to, ...).
4.4	48%	Information About Longer Recreational Trip Possibilities (places, how to plan, and actual examples).

Mean Response	Students Responding "Very" or "Quite" Important	Topic or Activity
4.4	46%	Student Union (facilities and services).
4.4	46%	Shopping Facilities On Campus (the Co-op).
4.4	44%	Shopping Facilities Off Campus (Eastbrook Mall).
4.4	44%	How to Buy at Lower Prices.
4.4	42%	Taxi Service.
4.4	40%	How to Learn About Events On and Off Campus (i.e., recreational and social).
4.4	38%	Train Service.
4.3	52%	Locations of Restaurants.
4.3	48%	Meal Plans Available on Campus.
4.3	46%	Newspapers Available in the Main Library.
4.3	44%	How to Transfer to Other Universities (and information about other institutions in the U.S.A.).
4.3	44%	American Culture (egalitarianism, work ethic, individualism, belief in change and growth, pragmatism, sense of mission, self-criticism, emphasis on youth).
4.3	42%	Shopping Facilities Near Campus (in Storrs).
4.3	40%	Airline Service.
4.3	38%	Sports Events (types of, and how to attend).
4.3	33%	Shopping Facilities Off Campus (Willimantic).
4.2	50%	How to Order and Customs at Fast Food and Other Restaurants.

Mean Response	Students Responding "Very" or "Quite" Important	Topic or Activity
4.2	40%	Information About Points of Interest in Connecticut Worth Visiting.
4.2	40%	Foreign Student Groups and Ethnic Centers (ex., Afro-American Cultural Center, Puerto Rican Center, ...).
4.2	38%	Host Family Program (purposes, how to obtain a host family, procedures and customs).
4.2	35%	Student Activities (Student Activities Office).
4.2	33%	Jorgensen Auditorium Events.
4.2	31%	Trip to Hartford.
4.1	42%	Giving an Oral Presentation.
4.1	33%	Trip to New Haven (Peabody Museum, Yale University).
4.0	40%	How to Buy Food at the Universal and at Specialized Food Stores.
4.0	35%	Taking Objective Tests.
4.0	33%	Writing Essay Tests.
4.0	31%	Travelling Alone Off Campus.
4.0	27%	Trip to Mystic (aquarium and seaport).
4.0	25%	Trips (Introductory) to Mansfield and Willimantic.
3.9	40%	Taking Class Notes Well.
3.9	19%	Trip to Sturbridge (a historical site).
3.8	25%	Preparing Academic and Social Schedules.
3.8	15%	Minority Cultures in the U.S.A. (diversity of minority groups,

Mean Response	Students Responding "Very" or "Quite" Important	Topic or Activity
		historical background, cultural characteristics, impact on "American Cultures", current goals and objectives, peoples of Connecticut).
3.7	27%	The Contemporary American Family (the nuclear family, single family, religion, marriage, working wives, divorce rate, youth, the elderly, impact on personality).
3.7	23%	The U.S. Political Process (divisions of responsibility, systems of representation, political parties and voting behavior, interest groups, presidential elections, state and local government).
3.6	15%	Trip to the Woodstock Fair (a country fair with games, animals, food, rides, ...).
3.3	13%	The Anonymous Pub (an introduction to).

Note. Calculations shown, unless otherwise noted, are based on the opinions of 48 foreign students at the University of Connecticut. Higher values indicate that the item is more important.

[a]Only students having a spouse in Connecticut responded to this item. N = 16.

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE AND COVER LETTER

International Center
U-182
University of Connecticut
Storrs, CT 06268

30 November 1981

Dear Foreign Student,

Please help the International Center improve the University's orientation program for new foreign students. Let us know your ideas and opinions about orientation activities.

Attached is a questionnaire which lists possible orientation topics and activities. On the line to the left of each item, please write one of the following numbers to show how important it is to include that item in the orientation program.

1. Very unimportant
2. Somewhat unimportant
3. Neither important nor unimportant
4. Somewhat important
5. Quite important
6. Very important (definitely include this)

In addition, please write any other suggestions or comments you would like to make about possible orientation activities, on the back of the questionnaire.

Try to complete the questionnaire today, if possible, and return it to me at the International Center, either directly or by campus mail. Your ideas and opinions are needed and will be highly valued.

Sincerely,

Dania C. Stevens
Director

tas

POSSIBLE ORIENTATION TOPICS AND ACTIVITIES

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE U.S. IN GENERAL

____ A. American Culture
(Egalitarianism, Work Ethic, Individualism, Belief in Change and Growth, Pragmatism, Mobility, Sense of Mission, Self-criticism, Emphasis on Youth.)

____ B. The Contemporary American Family
(The Nuclear Family; Single Family, Religion, Marriage, Working Wives, Divorce Rate, Youth, The Elderly, Impact on Personality.)

____ C. The U.S. Political Process
(Divisions of Responsibility, Systems of Representation, Political Parties and Voting Behavior, Interest Groups, Presidential Elections, State and Local Government.)

____ D. Minority Cultures In The U.S.A.
(Diversity of Minority Groups, Historical Background, Cultural Characteristics, Impact on "American Cultures"; Current Goals and Objectives, Peoples of Connecticut.)

____ E. The American System Of Higher Education
(Structure, Organization, Goals, Types of Higher Education Institutions,...)

____ F. Cultural Do's And Don'ts In The U.S.A.

II. INTRODUCTION TO THE UNIVERSITY AND ACADEMIC LIFE

____ A. The Campus At Storrs
(A Tour Of)

____ B. International Center
(Services, Programs, Staff)

____ C. International Student Office And The Foreign Student Advisor
(Role of, Location, Services Provided, Staff)

____ D. Foreign Student Groups And Ethnic Centers
(ex., Afro-American Cultural Center, Puerto Rican Center,...)

E. The Library

____ 1. General Tour Of The Main Library

____ 2. Use Of The Main Catalogue To Locate Books

____ 3. Use Of Specialized Journal Indexes
(In Academic Area Of Specialization)

____ 4. Government Publications
(An Introduction To What Is Available, Locations of U.S. and U.N. Documents,...)

____

___ 5. Specialized Library Collections On Campus
(Related To Academic Area Of Specialization)

___ 6. Newspapers Available In The Main Library

F. Writing Term Papers And Reports For Courses

___ 1. Accepted Styles Of Writing In Your Field Of Specialization

___ 2. Guidelines For Gathering Information And Writing Papers

G. Tests

___ 1. Taking Objective Tests

___ 2. Writing Essay Tests

H. Coursework

___ 1. Taking Class Notes Well

___ 2. Giving An Oral Presentation

___ 3. Preparing Academic And Social Schedules

___ I. The Registration Procedure

J. The Students School And Department

___ 1. Academic Advisor
(Introduction To, Role Of...)

___ 2. Department Faculty, Students, And Staff
(Introduction To...)

___ 3. Department Requirements For The Degree
(A Review Of...)

___ K. Assistantships
(An Introduction To Duties, Hours, Expectations, Fringe Benefits.)

___ L. Services Available To Students At The University
(ex. Counselling Services, Writing Clinic, Career Placement,...)

___ M. How To Transfer To Other Universities
(and Information About Other Institutions In The U.S.A.)

III. <u>DAILY LIVING</u>

___ A. Introduction To The Student's Housing Accommodations
(Mailboxes, Laundry, Cooking and Refrigerators, Telephone System...)

B. Eating In Storrs

___ 1. Locations Of Restaurants

___ 2. How To Order And Customs At Fast Food And Other Restaurants

___ 3. How To Buy Food At The Universal And At Specialized Food Stores

___ 4. Meal Plans Available On Campus

___ C. Banking In Storrs
(How To Open Checking And Savings Accounts)

___ D. Post Office
(Location, Services, and Prices)

E. Shopping Facilities
(Visits To and Information About)

___ 1. On Campus
(The Co-Op)

___ 2. Near Campus
(In Storrs)

3. Off Campus

___ - Eastbrook Mall

___ - Willimantic

___ 4. How To Buy At Lower Prices

___ F. Automobiles
(How To Get A Drivers License, Auto Registration, Insurance, How To Purchase A Car)

___ G. Housing
(How To Find, Costs,...)

H. Student Employment

___ 1. On Campus
(Student Work)

___ 2. Off Campus
(Regulations, How To Find)

I. Health Care

___ 1. Health Services At UCONN
(Introduction To Infirmary)

___ 2. Medical Insurance
(Types Of; How To Get)

___ 3. Tips For Healthy Living In The U.S.A.

___ 4. Off Campus Services
(Dental, Drug Stores, Hospitals)

J. Transportation

___ 1. On Campus

___ 2. Bus Service
(To Willimantic, Boston, Hartford, N.Y.)

___ 3. Train Service

___ 4. Airline Service

___ 5. Taxi Service

IV. RECREATIONAL AND SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

A. On Campus

1. Introduction To Activities And Services

___ - Athletic Facilities Available To Students
(Swimming Pools and Schedule of Use, Ice Skating, Horseback riding, Tennis,...)

___ - Sports Events
(Types Of, and How To Attend)

___ - Jorgensen Auditorium Events

___ - Student Activities
(Student Activities Office)

___ - Student Union
(Facilities and Services)

___ - The Anonymous Pub

2. Scheduled Participation In Activities

___ - Welcoming Dinner

___ - Welcoming Picnic
(At The International Center)

___ - Coffee Hours At The International Center

___ - Activities At The Graduate Student Residences
(To Help Meet And Socialize With Students There)

___ 3. How To Learn About Events On And Off Campus

B. Off Campus

1. Information About

___ a. Points Of Interest In Connecticut Worth Visiting

___ b. Longer Trip Possibilities
(Places, How To Plan, and actual examples)

___ c. Travelling Alone

___ 2. Host Family Program
(Purposes, How To Obtain A Host Family, Procedures and Customs)

3. Scheduled Trips

___ - Introduction To Mansfield And Willimantic

___ - Woodstock Fair
(A Country Fair With Games, Animals, Food, Rides,...)

___ - Mystic
(Aquarium and Seaport)

___ - Hartford

___ - New Haven
(Peabody Museum, Yale University)

___ - Sturbridge
(A Historical Site)

____ - Boston

____ - New York

V. U.S. GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS

____ A. Visa And Immigration
(Types Of Visas, Regulations, How To Change Visas,...)

____ B. Tax Regulations
(Income Tax)

____ C. Social Security
(How To Get Social Security Numbers; When They Are Needed)

VI. NEEDS OF THE SPOUSE (Answer only if your wife or husband is with you in Conn.)

____ A. Social Activities For The Spouse

____ B. English Language Training

____ C. Educational Opportunities

____ D. Work Opportunities

____ E. Health Care

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS: If you have comments and suggestions about these or other orientation activities, please write them on the back of this page.

_____ (Your Name)

_____ (Your Home Country)

_____ (Your Academic Specialization At UCONN)

_____ (Date)

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS: